FAULKNER BLUES: WILLIAM FAULKNER AND THE MISSISSIPPI DELTA BLUES

Gakuji Nakano

Introduction

It is widely held that in the American popular music scene in the 1920s there were, roughly speaking, two sub-genres to "the blues": "classic blues" or "vaudeville blues" on the one hand, and "country blues" or "folk blues" on the other. These terms themselves were coined long after the two types of music actually stopped being popular; at the time of their actual production and distribution, both types of blues were marketed alike as "race records." Yet, the two genres respectively exhibit distinctive characteristics: the former was widely popular not only among blacks but also in the mainstream American popular music market, while the latter remained largely unknown to the national audience, enjoyed almost exclusively by the blacks living in the agrarian South. Among the many "country blues" sub-genres usually labeled according to region, the one usually played in a distinctively rough-hewn and earthy style is generally called "Mississippi Delta blues" or simply "Delta blues," named after the specific region where it is widely believed to have been born.

Adam Gussow argues that the blues, arguably the first "truly" black genre of American popular music believed to have developed around 1890 in the Southern rural regions before diversifying in the 1920s into the two sub-genres mentioned above, was a kind of "collective black reaction to the Jim Crow violence prevalent in the turn-of-the-century American South" (*Murder* xii). If so, the voice of William Faulkner, a white Mississippi writer one of whose main focuses was on the unprecedentedly tensed interracial relationship in the Jim Crow

Mississippi, and those we can hear on the recordings of the "Delta blues" musicians, must have shared something. In this paper, I would like to demonstrate, after examining the actual circumstances concerning the process of production and consumption of the two different types of "black" popular music, how Faulkner's Southern whites' (un) awareness, concerning the "realities" of interracial relationship reflected in their typical way of appreciating black music, underwent serious questionings through an extremely painful process of awakening.

1

"Rock 'n' roll" was reputedly "born" in Memphis, Tennessee: to put it a little more in detail, it was in the studio called Sun run by the sound engineer Sam Philips, where Elvis Presley, then only a young truck driver, played offhandedly Arthur Crudup's 1949 blues number "That's All Right Mama," and the other session musicians followed. The engineer, sensing something interestingly unfamiliar going on, recorded it. It is an oft-repeated story that, on this very occasion, the bass player Bill Black said as follows, it is rumored, to emphasize its sheer originality of the recorded performance: "If we get that played, they might run us out of town" (quot. in Bertrand 114).

The episode epitomizes the typical American situation concerning the understanding of popular music in terms of race. In America, such "organic" racial mixing, culturally or politically, as could be found, for example, in South American nations did not develop at all, and this was also definitely the case with the field of popular music. Until well after the end of slavery in 1865, in short, the popular music heard in American everyday life, both in the Northern and Southern states, was, on the whole, definitely "white."

It was apparently around 1890, therefore, that the music featuring evidently "black" elements began to appear in the then strictly white-dominated American popular music scene, taking the specific style called "ragtime." Furthermore, it was not until in the 1920s that the people in the mainstream popular music industry began to recognize the importance of the demands by black consumers for distinctively

"black" music performed by blacks. The "black" music introduced in this way in the 1920s was later to be called "classic blues," the very first type of black popular music directly targeting black consumers. This initiated more than thirty-year period of strict division in the popular music scene along the white/black color line, until the birth in the 1950 s of "rock 'n' roll," a truly "mixed" genre of popular music.

The "classic blues" records thus targeted urban middle class blacks, but their musical tastes at that time, at least outwardly, were more or less the same as those of middle-class whites; cultural ideals among aspirant urban blacks then heavily mirrored the dominant white middle-class cultural ideology (Lerand 81). The music popular in the industry at that time was mostly produced after the way dominant in Tin Pan Alley, a New York district with many sheet music and record publishing companies specializing in popular music of mostly European-derived style, primarily aimed at middle-and-upper class whites. Reflecting this situation, "Crazy Blues," the very first song of "classic blues" performed in 1920 by the female black vaudeville singer Mamie Smith (1883–1946), sounds, to modern ears, much more "white" than "black"; every aspect of instrumental arrangement or song structure suggests that it was surely written and produced within the Tin Pan Alley popular song framework (Wald 21). In their earliest stage of development, in short, "blues" records as commercial products could not have existed except as an only nominally "black" form like "classic blues," as it was all part of the larger social and cultural movement, the Harlem Renaissance; frequently called "a biracial phenomenon" (Douglass 393), it was all in all a white patron-led urban cultural movement to bring "New Negro" culture to national awareness.

Meanwhile, almost totally unknown to this mainstream white-dominated popular music industry, blacks living in the rural parts of the South after the Reconstruction period (1866–77), though devastating disillusionment followed the wholesale implementation of so-called Jim Crow laws in the 1890s, had already started to establish economic and cultural, though not political, independence after a fashion; now,

after a long history of enslavement, they could form their own communities, wherein they could independently work, play, worship, and even enjoy themselves, though still only under severely restricted conditions. The most representative secular amusement space in a rural black community was called a "barrel-house" or a "juke joint," where local black people gathered to enjoy liquor and music; travelling musicians, or "songsters" as they were called then, were often hired to play songs, usually only with the guitar, some among them even making professions out of it. The songsters, we can imagine, must have competed with each other to hone the styles of music they were asked to play on those occasions, sometimes catering to the customers' tastes, and at other times trying to be faithful to their own musical visions. The blacks in the South in this period, thus, gradually developed for the first time in their long history of American experience the music that truly resonated with the emotions simmering in their new yet extremely stressful Jim Crow life: "the blues" (Cobb 280–83).

So-called "country blues" is a term generally applied to the type of American commercial black music in the late 1920s and the 1930s widely believed to retain many of the characteristics of blues in the seminal form. Although there still has been much argument as to its "true" origin because of lack of any recorded evidence, when we usually say "blues" we most frequently refer to "country blues" as its most unadulterated, "authentic" form.[1]

Typical "country blues" songs we can hear today, such as the ones performed by, for example, Charlie Patton (1887 or 1891–1934), Son House (1902–1988), or—arguably the most representative—Robert Johnson (1912–1938), have many evidently African-originated characteristics to them: limited melodic compass, frequent use of the so-called "blue notes"—the addition of flatted 3rd and 7th notes—, heavily syncopated rhythmic structure, or call-and response guitar instrumentation, all of which combine to create a distinctive sense of "incompleteness," as it were; structurally repetitive and monotonous, the music sounds like as if it might not end, repeating itself forever with

little sense of the definite directional characteristics of the Euro-American musical tradition, to which the Tin Pan Alley type of popular music also belonged (Owada 56–60).

I am not claiming here that "authentic" blues does or should have as many "African" elements as possible, nor that the more "African" elements a given blues song has, the purer, therefore the better[2]; instead, what I would like to emphasize is that a typical "country blues" song demonstrates, with these significantly "African" elements, a texture of acute emotional ambiguity, a sense which seriously conflicts with what people with European musical background would consider as "comfortable." It is highly likely that this very atmosphere of emotional precariousness within the minimum Euro-American framework of chord progression "I–IV–V" is what the blacks in those highly insecure situations must have felt they needed, the music genuinely corresponding to their daily state of mind under restrictive Jim Crow laws. It is no wonder, then, that these elements surely had to be standardized and urbanized, given some coherent structure—"whitened up," that is—when it was "discovered" around the turn of the century and gradually incorporated into the "white"-dominated mainstream popular music industry in the 1920s to produce "classic blues."

2

During the years since the end of the Reconstruction, the racial situation in the South went from bad to worse, reaching its nadir at around 1890.

> Radicalism appeared and spread rapidly through the South. The core of the Radical mentality was the concept that Negroes, freed from the restraining influences of slavery, were rapidly "retrogressing" toward their natural state of bestiality. Older Negroes were susceptible to fall, but, more importantly, in the mid-eighties young Negroes were coming into manhood who had been born free and have never felt the civilizing effects of slavery. By 1889

> the "New Negro," as white contemporaries labeled him, might be twenty-four years old. Indeed, he was a new man, and his potential was unknown. (Williamson 111)

As if in proportion to the gradual development of black economic and cultural independence including the situation concerning the development of blues as discussed above, many whites in the South of this period went further under the influence of intense collective neuroticism against "uppity" blacks, unfoundedly fearing that many "black beast rapists" supposedly might be craving the flesh of Southern white women; many forms of terrorism such as lynching, accordingly, became uncontrollably widespread. The need for strict judgment as to what exactly the characteristics of being "black" were and should be accordingly became so urgent among Southern whites that it turned out, ironically, that the fear of *their own* potential racial ambiguity became overwhelmingly powerful: "[in the early twentieth century South, people] came to fear hidden blackness, the blackness within seeming whiteness" (Williamson 464). This hysteria caused whites to further cement their essentialist views on race handed down from older generations. Lillian Smith and W. J. Cash, severely critical of this situation, argue on this matter as follows:

> Our people [Southern whites] were meeting trouble by closing up their lives, minds, hearts, consciences, trying not to see, not to feel *things as they really are.* (Smith 67, emphasis mine)

> We whites have a color glaze on our imaginations that makes it hard to feel with *the people we have segregated ourselves from.* (Smith 69, emphasis mine)

> [. . .] [T]he defense of slavery not only eventuated [. . .] in a taboo on criticism; in the same process it set up a ban on all analysis and inquiry, a terrified truculence toward every new idea, a disposition to reject innovation out of hand hug to the whole of

the status quo *with fanatical resolution.* (Cash 98, emphasis mine)

To be fair, those seemingly "fanatical" Southern whites were, of course, no monsters; they were just ordinary people, and they more often thought that they were doing the best they could do for the "inferior" race rather than being selfishly hysterical in preserving a racial color line. The case would be, if anything, that they were caught in a system so powerfully binding that even their very best conducts had already been tainted with hypocrisy, distorting the "truths" which had remained unspoken beneath the surface of the rigid hierarchical structure of the entire Southern society. It was virtually impossible, thus, for the Southern whites to *really* know what they were *actually* doing to blacks.

As I have already argued, since the birth in the 1920s of "classic blues" to that of "rock 'n' roll" in the 1950s, the American popular music market went strictly divided along color lines. In this process, the "black side" became further segmented into such eclectic genres as "classic blues" and "swing jazz" on the one hand, which soon became part of the mainstream white popular culture, and on the other, the "country blues" and its later urban offshoots such as "Chicago blues" or "R&B," enjoyed constantly and almost exclusively by lower class blacks in the South or in northern urban areas. It is reasonable, then, to assume that while "classic blues" must have represented for the white imagination "quaint" blackness they can easily tame and control, the music that virtually did not reach their ears like "country blues" must have meant, symbolically in whites' cultural unconscious, a dark and menacing realm of "real blackness," whicht was inextricably associated with harsh Jim Crow "realities" that they cannot possibly bring themselves to face. "Country blues" was widely popular throughout the rural Southern black market from the late 1920s to the 1930s, but gradually went out of vogue as the musical tastes of the Southern blacks, rural and urban alike, generally transformed around the late 1930s to prefer more sophisticated styles owing to technological developments (Filene 79); actually it was on the whole forgotten

even by the blacks themselves until it was "re-evaluated" and given a renewed attention during the period from the late 1950s to 1960s by a younger generation of whites influenced by such British blues-and-rock 'n' roll-oriented bands as, for example, the Rolling Stones, the Beatles, or the Animals (Wald 220–49).[3] The fact suggests that the music was considered by the blacks themselves, as they migrated in great numbers to the urban areas to fulfill economic and cultural aspirations, as representing something from which they would rather distance themselves, something deeply associated, in some way, with their past "real" life in the Southern rural home.

Adam Gussow, as I mentioned briefly in the introduction, argues that "[b]lack southerners evolved blues songs as a way of speaking back to, and maintaining psychic health in the face of, an ongoing threat of lynching" (*Murder* xii).[4] Then, the songs of the bluesmen in the Mississippi Delta region, where the Jim Crow violence was reputedly the severest and the concentration of black people extremely high (Cobb 99; 114–5), must have had inscribed on themselves the trace of "real" black sufferings under an inhumane political system. How, then, did William Faulkner, the white Mississippi writer who imaginatively tackled the problems of tensed Jim Crow interracial relationship near the Delta region, respond to them? We will move on to answer the question in the next section.

3

In light of what has been discussed in the previous sections, we will consider how Faulkner's masterpiece short story "That Evening Sun" (1931), whose title presumably derives from the typical "classic blues" song, "St. Louis Blues," eloquently and poignantly voices the situation of a Southern white on the brink of becoming aware of the meanings encoded in blues. This story shares much in terms of its setting with *The Sound and the Fury* (1929), so our discussion will make frequent references to the novel.

The narrative present is in the 1910s, yet the main action takes place fifteen years before that; the adult Quentin Compson, now

twenty-four, remembers and narrates of his childhood days, when Nancy, a young female part-time household worker-cum-washing woman, comes to the Compson house after the regular housemaid Dilsey got sick.[5] He recounts how the three Compson children, the eldest Quentin himself, his sister Caddy, and his brother Jason, are all somehow attracted to Nancy; she is a tall, graceful and sad-faced black woman. Yet Nancy says that she is very much afraid that Jesus, her common-law husband who seems to have vanished for some unknown reason, will soon—or must have already—come back to kill her, so she does not like to go home alone to her cabin even after she has finished her work; this is an enigma, for nobody in the town including Nancy herself seems to know exactly where Jesus is now, and judging from the information the reader is given, the couple surely seem to have been deeply in love with each other.

One night, while sleeping in his upstairs bedroom, Quentin hears someone make a strange sound outside. Intrigued, he gets up and goes out into the hallway to see what is happening, only to find Nancy, who has been permitted to stay in the Compson house overnight, crouching alone halfway on the stairs, making a weird music with her voice. Quentin describes the scene as follows:

> It was like singing and it wasn't like singing, like the sounds that Negroes make. (*CS* 296)

In fact, in this story, the underlying, unarticulated "truth" is that Nancy, a supposedly beautiful black woman with brown skin, has long been having sexual relationships assumedly with several white males, including the town's most renowned members, and though neither she nor the husband Jesus is satisfied with the situation they have to remain silent about it, all because they are "niggers." There surely is, then, terrible sexual exploitation going on in Quentin's own immediate neighborhood, and at the end of the story the reader knows that Nancy, with her beloved husband gone, has been driven to sheer madness. However, all the Compson members including even

Quentin's apparently benevolent and responsible father Jason finally leave Nancy alone in her cabin, not taking her entreating words seriously; they just go on home abandoning her, and the story abruptly ends. The adult Quentin, now twenty-four, almost certainly knows at least *some* of the whole truth and its moral repercussion, or so we can speculate, yet he, in the persona of a nine-year-old boy, never articulates it, with the consequence that the reader also cannot understand the situation clearly. Yet, whatever little he knows, here Quentin seems to be unmistakably sensing *something* serious in the strange sound that Nancy is making here; he says that it was *like* singing yet *not like* singing either, *like* the sound that he is accustomed to hear blacks make, but *not exactly.*

In *The Sound and the Fury*, the narrator says that Dilsey, coming home from an exceptionally moving Easter service, sings a "hymn" to herself "over and over" in the Compson kitchen (301); this urges us to speculate that Dilsey, a devout member of an African American church, is probably long accustomed to sing on some occasions "spirituals" in the white household.[6] Quentin, then, should probably know the black religious songs with strong African characteristics, so if Quentin hears some of those songs he will almost certainly know at least whether it is a "singing" or not. In the context of our discussion of this story problematizing the race relationship in the 1890s Mississippi, then, what should we think this peculiar strain of Nancy's voice represents if it is not related to the seminal form of the blues, a new form of genuinely African American musical expression under the newly-implemented Jim Crow institutions?

Now, as I said in the beginning of this section, the title "That Evening Sun" is widely known to have come from "St. Louis Blues," one of the most famous "classic blues" song which starts with the line "I hate to see that evening sun go down." The song depicts the sadness of a woman whose lover has left the town they have been living in, which seems, indeed, to fit in comfortably with Nancy's situation in the story: her beloved common-law husband, Jesus, seems to have left the town of Jefferson apparently deserting her.

However, in light of what has been discussed so far, here we would surely have to stop and think that Nancy's "like singing/not like singing" voice *must not* have had much in common with that of Bessie Smith's, at least with the one to be heard on her record "St. Louis Blues" released in 1925; this is primarily because, to put it as simply as possible, Bessie Smith's "classic blues" song in question is, both in the sound texture and its lyrical theme, a little too "white": its overall texture being a little too dramatic and too coherently structured, that is, too much of a commercial product for white consumption, to genuinely represent Nancy's, and Jesus' also, racially-charged suffering here at the hands of unknowingly brutal whites.[7]

"St. Louis Blues" was "composed" strictly for white consumption in 1914; it was still six years before, as I argued, the music industry "discovered" for the first time the potential black market with the unexpected success of "Crazy Blues" in 1920. The composer was W. C. Handy (1873–1958), frequently called "the Father of the Blues," an African American classically-trained popular song composer from minstrel-show business. He claims in his autobiography that he had never thought seriously about the blues until he had happened upon it at a rural Mississippi railway station while on a travelling tour through the South in 1903; a black man, according to his account, was playing the guitar on the platform, singing to himself, and it was "the weirdest sound I [Handy] had ever heard" (74). Although he claims he had known all along the type of music that the man was playing, he saw it then "with the eye of a budding composer" (75). He subsequently "composed" many "blues" songs based on the melody, words and structure he had heard then, one of which was none other than "St. Louis Blues."

"St. Louis Blues," as it turned out, was "the most recorded song in the first half of the century (Campbell 53). Handy recounts how the white audience enthusiastically responded to his band play his versions of "blues": "[white] people seemed to be starving for blues" (128). Indeed, though the song's most famous rendition is that of Bessie Smith, reputedly one of the greatest "blues" singer—whether "classic,"

"country," male or female—of all time, and the musical texture of the whole arrangement of the version surely sometimes does become very "bluesy," it is by its very nature so carefully structured and produced that it may well appeal to people regardless of age, sex, color of the skin, or birthplace. Handy himself, as a black male born in the South in 1873, frequently experienced harsh Jim Crow racism in his career (Gussow, *Murder* 66–119); yet he was determined to succeed in the white-dominated mainstream popular music scene, which had already started to recognize the fascination of African-derived music. He writes in his autobiography as follows, demonstrating his keen sensitivity with regard to white musical tastes at that time: "when 'St. Louis Blues' was written the tango was in vogue [among the white patrons of Memphis clubs and bars for which his band was hired to play]" (122); he accordingly decided to introduce his upcoming "blues" tune with tango.[8] Indeed, "only the first and third strains of 'St. Louis Blues' employ traditional twelve-bar blues structure. The second strain [. . .] is an unambiguous tango[. . .]. It's [. . .] something of a compositional pastiche, though intentionally so" (Davis 59).

In sharp contrast with this "composition" with such a universal touch intended to appeal to as many whites as possible, what the short story in question dramatizes could not have had any relevance anywhere other than in the Jim Crow South: the irreparably devastated life of a black couple on account of collective white ignorance and sexual abuse. This is, no doubt, a situation which any "classic blues" song, whoever might have been the singer, could not possibly have represented. The gap between what the song intends and what the story actually represents is so wide that, when we would interpret this story in connection with this particular song at all, it must be in an *ironical* way[9]; the song is used here, in sum, just to incisively mock and denounce, through its thematic *irrelevance* to the grim Jim Crow "realities," the sheer white unawareness of it; and we can speculate that the criticism here must have been pointed also at Faulkner himself.[10]

If "That Evening Sun" should look as if it were mainly treating such a universal theme as failed love and the concomitant female

sadness, it would be precisely because this story is told by a white boy who does not know—or who is *trying* not to know—any better than that, and whose perception is heavily influenced by the white adults around him, most typically his father and mother. They, as elites of the community, surely have long been trained not to see, or not to take seriously at least, what they are actually witnessing: the suffering of not only Nancy's, but also Jesus'. Indeed, if this story has long been straightforwardly associated with "St. Louis Blues," it is not only because it is obviously the song a portion of whose lyrics is used as its title but because this story has almost always been interpreted primarily as a story about the suffering of a black woman, not of a black man, as the following comment of Charles A. Peek typically shows: "'That Evening Sun' is Nancy's blues, leaving aside for the moment the question whether it is also Quentin's; and it is Nancy's at a point of transition, of radical change." However, despite Peek's persuasive argument elsewhere, *this* blues is *not* Quentin's, and is no less Jesus' than Nancy's.

Quentin, with his acute sensibility, is capable of sensing something terrible in Nancy's voice, some indefinable air he is not accustomed to feel in the presence of the blacks he is familiar with; yet, as I said above he cannot possibly articulate it, nor can he even merely acknowledge it to himself. It is not only because of the severe limitations of his perceptive ability as a child, of course, but also because, far more importantly, he is the eldest son in an old Southern family: what seems to be happening between Jesus, Nancy, Father and Mother, in short, *could* have some extremely serious effect on his sense of family honor, because of its highly sexual nature. Her mother says jealously to her husband: "'You'll leave me alone, to take Nancy home?' mother said. 'Is her [Nancy's] safety more precious to you than mine?'" (*CS* 293). When his father and mother are arguing over whether or not he should see Nancy home, Quentin again seems to feel something seriously important in his father's silence[11]:

"Jason [Quentin's father]!" mother said. She was speaking to

> father. You could tell that by the way she said the name. Like she believed all day father had been trying to think of doing the thing she wouldn't like the most, and that she knew all the time that after a while he would think of it. I stayed quiet, because father and I both knew that mother would want him to make me stay with her if she just thought of it in time. *So father didn't look at me. I was the oldest. I was nine and Caddy was seven and Jason was five.* (*CS* 294, emphasis mine)

What Quentin thinks here is that, as in *The Sound and the Fury*, because he is the eldest son in a prestigious family he is the one who has to fulfill the role of helping the father, the patriarch, manage the family honor, most strongly concerned in the Southern culture with men's gallantry toward the female family members (Wyatt-Brown 53); accordingly, he cannot admit that there is anything in his family at all that *could* damage it, especially if he, as is implied here, thinks he *has to* take sides with his own father's ethical standing, all because of his love and loyalty he evidently has toward his father.

With Quentin, thus, it is in fact far more difficult to what to make of Jesus than Nancy, for Jesus' problem is distantly yet unmistakably entwined with his own strong obsession with the sexual honor of his sister, which is painfully laid bare in *The Sound and the Fury.* The adult Quentin seems to be on the very verge of fully understanding the whole circumstances of Jesus' plight through subconsciously identifying with him, which would be the main reason Jesus should be such a menacing element throughout the story he narrates in the first place. Though the reader is not given any substantial information as to his whereabouts, at least Jesus' only words of intense rage in the story against the man—almost certainly a white—who impregnated Nancy, loom distantly but hauntingly in his/her mind:

> "I can *cut down the vine* [an implicit reference to a male sexual organ] *it* [the baby in Nancy's swelling belly] *did come off of*," Jesus said.

[. . .]

"I can't hang around white man's kitchen," Jesus said. "But white man can hang around mine. White man can come in my house, but I cant stop him. When white man want to come in my house, I aint got no house. I cant stop him, *but he cant kick me outten it. He cant do that*." (*CS* 292, emphasis mine)

This marks the moment when, if only momentarily, the reader is keenly exposed to what it really means to be a black *male* in the 1890s Jim Crow South. What we can clearly see from this passage is that Jesus is seriously driven into a corner, and yet he is determined never to remain submissive about it anymore; presumably because of his intense love for Nancy and his strong sense of pride, he seems to be fiercely in rage against the whites taking sexual liberties with her and to feel that, if he should have to stand it more than this he might even dare "cut down the vine," which means killing and even emasculating —the usual way of lynching blacks by whites—the white man who he suspects must have impregnated his wife. In the story he is introduced as a man who would not assist his wife doing laundry work for whites as any other husbands do, and this characteristic has generally been interpreted mostly as indicating his laziness or indifference toward his wife; however, here we should think that it indicates, instead, his strong sense of pride, his decision never to take part in anything that might be of any service to the exploitative whites, which is, in itself, one of the historically well-documented forms of black rebellion. Nevertheless, everyone but Quentin in this story very strongly takes it for granted that Jesus must have simply left her for another woman somewhere: a totally unfounded assumption, which must have come from a blatant yet conventional "white" misunderstanding of black male characteristics in general.

What makes Jesus' situation here more acute still is the fact that even Nancy, to whom he sometimes gives "one dollar if he has two" (*CS* 293), is not capable of understanding these acutely painful words of his; as is clear throughout the story, she has resigned herself to

typical Jim Crow situations, because, of course, she has no other choice, taking it for granted that even if she is regularly exploited by whites, they, both the wife and husband, as members of a supposedly "inferior" race cannot do anything to prevent it (*CS* 297). In short, here, unlike his wife Nancy who has at least one very attentive "listener," Quentin, to her music, Jesus does not have any actual "audience," as it were, to listen to his words of irrepressible rage against whites.

If we try to give appropriate musical expression to the intense rage and suffering Jesus here suddenly demonstrates, thus, we would need to project our imagination beyond the realm of the 1920s female "classic blues" to that of the 1930s male "Delta blues." Jesus' blues, heard evocatively beyond Nancy's ominous "like singing but not like singing" voice, create a long-lasting dissonance in the seemingly innocent Southern world that the twenty-four-year-old Quentin recreates. It should not be too much to say, then, that Jesus' voice urgently foreshadows that of Robert Johnson, the legendary Delta blues figure whose shrill slide guitar and mysteriously harsh voice resonated throughout the Delta region in the 1930s. When he was reputedly poisoned at the age of twenty-seven by a jealous man enraged over Johnson's relationship with his girlfriend in 1938, the potential expression of irrepressibly enraged black male blues feelings developed in the Jim Crow Delta was virtually repressed again; it was not until in the 1960 s, the era of "Black Power" movement, that the "white" America was seriously confronted with the true legacy of Jesus' blues. Yet, looking back at the moment when Jimi Hendrix (1942–1970) awe-inspiringly played his electric guitar version of the "Star Spangled Banner" in the 1969 Woodstock Festival, we cannot miss that its trenchant criticism of the white America's outrageous hypocrisy both in the domestic and foreign politics definitely had one of its very important roots in the muted yet haunting voices of suffering blacks in the Jim Crow South.

Conclusion

Faulkner took the whole 1930s and the early 1940s to get himself

to really face through the production of a series of massive works what Quentin in the story could not accept; furthermore, "[a]s Faulkner probes the emotional sources and signifying registers of black blues expression with increasing subtlety in the course of his career, [. . .] his blues-literary art [. . .] grows more pessimistic about the power of the blues to engender interracial understanding" (Gussow, *Journeyman* 149). This fact alone provides an ample evidence of how immensely difficult a job it must have been for Southern whites to actually start to think of blacks as human beings, which would mean, in our discussion here, for Mississippi whites to fully appreciate the meaning of "Delta blues." To read in "That Evening Sun" only the evidence of how unjustly blacks were treated or how cruel and ignorant the Southern whites actually were in the Jim Crow years, though always necessary, would never be enough: through its carefully-layered narrative and thematic structure we are strongly urged to imagine, in addition to the points above, how Quentin Compson, the alter-ego of Faulkner himself, must have found it extremely painful and difficult to listen to "Delta blues."

Charlie Patton, often called the "founding father of Delta Blues," recorded his repertory for the first time in 1929 (Fahey 24–31), when the era of female "classic blues" was almost over[12]; at around the same time, Faulkner brilliantly captured a traditional Southern way of life on the verge of collapse primarily on account of the threatening forces of "blackness" symbolically taking the form of a white upper-class girl going sexually promiscuous: a behavior considered typically "black" then. Immediately afterwards in 1931 he published "That Evening Sun," demonstrating how seriously deep-rooted the white blindness toward black suffering has been. At around the same time, again, that Robert Johnson recorded his songs, Faulkner wrote *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936), which scathingly penetrated to the very core of Southern experiences in relation to the "real" meaning of "blackness." Sato Yoshiaki argues that the radical change that was taking place in Faulkner's literary voice around 1927, when he wrote *Flags in the Dust*, his very first attempt at tackling the problems of his native lands, was

"going in a direction toward capturing the 'black' voice which was becoming more and more audible [to whites] through the development of acoustic technology" (26). The apparent temporal synchronicity between these Delta blues musicians and William Faulkner was, then, never merely a coincidence.

Notes

[1] Though Ann Douglass argues that the female "classic blues"—what she calls the "blues live and on record in the 1920s" sung by the "black divas" (408) such as Bessie Smith (1894–1937) and Mamie Smith—and the "country blues" had much in common, in purely musical terms we have to say they more differ from each other than share much.

[2] Recent discourse concerning the blues generally focuses itself upon its own "constructed" qualities, thereby deconstructing this kind of understanding. See Wald, Filene, and Iino.

[3] Filene writes, though noting that he could not find "the original source for this story" "as with many telling anecdotes about the blues" (259), that when, in the time of their first arrival to the United States in 1963, the Beatles expressed their desire to see Muddy Waters (1915–1983) and Bo Diddley (1928–2008), two representative blues/R&B singers/guitarists, one of the interviewers asked "where's that?" and Paul McCartney responded, "Don't you know who your own famous people are here?" (123). Muddy Waters, a black blues singer from the Mississippi Delta region, was still very active in Chicago then.

[4] The case is that the known individual blues songs contain very few actual reference to the violence they were daily exposed to; accordingly, there has not been any consensus as to the extent of the effect of Jim Crow violence on the production of blues songs, some expressing strong reservations against the tendency to regard blues as a direct reaction to tragic life of segregation. However, it is at least certain that blues "actually evolved as part of a process whereby former slaves drew on both their Africa and American heritages to formulate a cultural response to the much-anticipated but generally disappointing experience of emancipation" (Cobb 279).

[5] To critics' dismay, though in the novel he commits suicide at the age of twenty he is here, strangely enough, narrating the story at the age of twenty-four.

[6] Spirituals are African American sacred songs with strong African-derived characteristics; yet they have a very long tradition which dates back well into the early days of slavery (Baraka 32–49), so that at the narrative present of this story in the 1890s they had already been long and firmly established as a vital part of African American culture actively countenanced by local whites, because "[o]n the surface at least, spirituals [in the days of slavery] imply acceptance rather than direct, physical challenge to slavery" (Filene 30).

[7] Though Adam Gussow argues that some of the lines in "St. Louis Blues" "are a memorable evocation of the troubled African mind in the age of Jim Crow" (*Murder* 75) and I can largely agree with him, my point here is that most contemporary whites that listened to this song, Faulkner himself included, could not have penetrated into such depths of this seemingly innocuous song, or it would not have been able to stand as a commercial product for white consumption.

[8] "[Tango] arrived in America in 1913 from Argentina by way of Paris, where Irene and Vernon Castle had captivated audiences with their dancing of the tango. Upon their return to the United States, they introduced it in a Broadway show, The Sunshine Girl, where it was an immediate success" (Campbell 186).

[9] Regarding the typical reading in which "St. Louis Blues" rather straightforwardly figures as a key element in the story's interpretation, see Peek, Krause, and Gartner. Bennett, however, persuasively claims that Faulkner's title "conjures up a far richer range of associations than an identification only with Handy's 'St. Louis Blues' would suggest" (342). Beppu also argues that the correspondence between "That Evening Sun" and "St. Louis Blues" is "only superficial" (32). She further suggests the possibility that the sound Nancy makes here "might have something to do with the blues [in its original, rural form]" (36). What I am attempting here is, then, to examine the implication of Faulkner's having titled this story in this seemingly "superficial" way.

[10] Faulkner is known to have liked W. C. Handy's band that came to play at the University of Mississippi dance parties around 1920 (Wasson 36–38), but he seems to have been somewhat critical of the Harlem Renaissance cultural movement as a whole, presumably because, in the context of this paper, it must have started to seem to him at some point in his career merely superficial, "white" appropriation of African American culture. According to David Levering Lewis, when Carl Van Vechten showed "tipsy Faulkner" around Harlem, "Faulkner's unvarying slurred request was for 'St. Louis Blues'" (183); moreover, Faulkner's long-time friend Ben Wasson, who was with him supposedly on some of those Harlem night-clubbings with Van Vechten, writes in his memoir that Faulkner said, in a taxicab on his way to his hotel after seeing an African American female singer wildly performing a song before a mixed audience, as follows: "'Down in Memphis, I wouldn't spend my time in Beale Street mixing around socially, and I wouldn't do it again in New York's Harlem. It's a fad to do it and sensation-seeking'" (123).

[11] For further discussion concerning what Quentin here is supposedly thinking *might* be happening among the main adult characters in this story, see Nakano. The paper discusses the possibility that Mrs. Compson's words and behavior described by Quentin seem to suggest that she is rather suspicious of the nature her husband's relationship with Nancy.

[12] Concerning the numerous factors of this decline, see Harrison, 61.

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